

Archbishop Lori's Remarks - Opening Remarks; Social Ministry Convocation

Social Ministry Convocation

Mercy High School

Baltimore, MD

Mar. 3, 2018

I want to thank you most sincerely for your presence today and with you, I want to thank a great pioneer & veteran practitioner of social justice, none other than Monsignor Bill Burke! Monsignor, thank you so much! I also want to thank Mary Beth Lennon and the student representatives for welcoming us so warmly this morning (where better to have a convocation with the theme of mercy and justice!), together with students from Mt. St. Joseph's High School. Let me also offer a word of thanks to all those who organized this 39th Social Ministry Convocation. I am grateful to you even as I am to those who will offer presentations during the day. May this gathering be an occasion of grace for the whole Archdiocese!

And with all of you I want to recognize in advance all those whom we shall recognize more formally later on in our program. Our honorees exemplify commitment to the Gospel of Mercy and Justice, embraced not as a mere abstraction but rather in the people whose lives they have changed . . . and in changing lives you also change the culture of which we are all a part. My warmest thanks to all of you for your various ministries dedicated to living the Church's teaching on social justice.

As Msgr. Burke mentioned, on Ash Wednesday of this present year, I published pastoral reflections on the principles of non-violence of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I hope that you have received copies of this letter or have accessed it on line. In case you haven't, a brought along copies this morning and they are available near the registration tables. Before a tell you why I wrote it and what my hopes are, let me say a word about the on-line version.

I'm not technologically oriented – some would say that I have the technological skills of the Cro-Magnon Man and to that charge I'd probably have to plead 'guilty'! But I am excited about the on-line version which includes videos of Dr. King's speeches and sermons, news coverage of Dr. King's assassination, and many other pivotal events in the struggle for civil rights. We have also tracked down footage of Cardinal Shehan's testimony in support of open housing before the Baltimore City Council in 1966. It is currently being digitized and will be added to the online version of my letter God-willing in the coming weeks. You will also find testimony and comment from parishioners involved in the current struggles for racial justice as well as footage of prayer services conducted locally. All this and more is available on the Archdiocesan website, www.archbalt.org.

The heart of the letter's teaching is not mine but rather it is Dr. King's. My desire was to honor the 50th anniversary of his tragic death by recalling his principles of non-violence and by meditating on them through the lens of the Church's social teaching. Dr. King's principles in fact take us to the heart of the Gospel and at the same time to the heart of our own social teaching. They are aimed at the conversion of our hearts not as a head trip but rather as an impetus for action – as a way of resisting injustice peacefully whilst working for a better day.

In addition to the principles, I include the action steps that Dr. King also recommended that we take. As I laid them out and reflected on them, it became clear to me that these are things all of us can do. They are not too lofty or too complicated or too expensive for any of us to do. And if more of us would take these action steps, the world we live in and the society of which we are a part would be a better place.

Why, then, did I write this letter? I would mention in passing that I don't often write pastoral letters – this is only my second in six years – because I think less is better. Yet, I felt compelled to write this letter and indeed rejoiced to write it for the following reasons.

First, I wanted to honor Dr. King on the anniversary of his assassination. It is scarcely possible for me to believe that 50 years have passed since that awful night in Memphis when he was taken from us. One way to honor a person is to recall with

reverence what that person said and did. The principles of non-violence for direct action are part of Dr. King's enduring legacy. In a violent time, he was a courageous prophet of non-violence, a prophet whose dream still resonates in our hearts.

Second, I believe these principles are key to helping us now to address the ongoing scourge of racism, bigotry, and inequality in our midst, most especially the inequality that hobbles so many neighborhoods in our City but also elsewhere in the Archdiocese. These principles represent a path to dialogue with purpose – opening lines of mutual respect and understanding so necessary if we would address at long last the root causes of racism and the root causes of the heartbreaking social problems we face, including and especially the gun violence that robs us of our youth.

Third, we live in a time when, as a society, we've forgotten how to talk with one another, reason with one another, disagree respectfully. We live in an angry society so prone to hyperbole, so prone coarseness. It is not only bullets that inflict death; death of the spirit is also inflicted by words of hatred. Dr. King's message to us is therefore especially timely and necessary.

Finally, there is need for dialogue not only in civil society but indeed in the church of which we are a part, the need for us to overcome our divisions, the need for us to talk to one another in a manner than it is not only civil but indeed loving and respectful.

So what were my hopes in penning this letter? It was not an attempt to make a pronouncement on high but only to reflect faithfully the teaching of Dr. King, as I have already said, through the lens of the Church's social teaching.

But more than that, it was my hope to start a conversation in our church, in our city, in our nine counties – a conversation about how we are related to one another in the communion of God's love, a conversation about racial and economic justice, a conversation about address systemic problems, a conversation that will break down barriers, help form friendships, build bridges across the lines that divide, and make the church 'a light brightly visible' in a culture often shrouded by injustice and hatred. For that reason, the letter includes a page (accessible on line) for comment and the letter itself includes discussion questions meant to prime conversations in

parishes, in prayer groups, and in other gatherings in the Church and far beyond.

Thank you in advance for receiving this small effort so graciously. And thank you also for marking your calendars because on the evening of April 12, 2018, at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, an interfaith prayer service will be held to mark the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. - and the principal speaker will be Rev. Dr. Raphael Gamaliel Warnock, the Senior Pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta . . .a successor of Dr. King. Dr. Warnock served in Baltimore some years ago and his sister still lives here so I hope we will turn out in force to hear him speak, to pray, and to unite in our determination to overcome some day!

God bless you and God keep you always in his love!